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Some Observations on the U.S. Approach to the Problem of the Defense Security of the Middle East

Middle East

From the U.S. viewpoint the Middle East problem has two aspects - the political and the military.

The political aspect is compounded of rising nationalism, antagonism toward the west, the instability of certain governments in the region, Mossadegh, the Anglo-Egyptian dispute, the preoccupation of Pakistan with Kashmir, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and plenty of other things. The military aspect arises from the vulnerability of the area to armed invasion by the Soviet Union.

It is true that the two aspects are closely related. The political difficulties cannot be overcome unless there is some assurance of protection against Soviet aggression. It is equally true that the military defense of the Middle East will be prejudiced by the extent to which it is undertaken amidst hostile native peoples.

The U.S. is devoting considerable thought, energy and resources to the political aspect of the problem. Military assistance and training missions, economic aid, Point IV programs and various other measures of political and economic support are being extended to most of the states of the region. The U.S. has supported Turkey's admission to NATO. It has tried to mediate in the Anglo-Egyptian, Anglo-Iranian and Indian-Pakistan conflicts.

It might be argued that meanwhile the U.S. has allowed the military aspect to go by default.

It is not suggested that there can or should be any change at present in the existing policy: namely, that the defense of the Middle East is primarily a British responsibility and that the U.S. can neither spare any forces for the defense of the area nor enter into any commitment to protect the Middle East if it is attacked.

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The question is whether, within the limitations of this policy, there are measures which the U.S. could take to strengthen the military security of the region.

The military problem begins with the assumption that if there is a Soviet attack on the Middle East it is likely to come through the Caucasus and perhaps also through the Balkans and across the Straits. Whether it is aimed at the Persian Gulf or Suez or Greece or all three, there appears to be general acceptance of the probability that Turkey would be involved. The further probability is that the Soviets themselves would assume that they could not expect to by-pass Turkey on a thrust through Iran to the Persian Gulf or in an attack on Greece in Macedonia.

If this is the probable nature of the attack the next question is: what are the forces available to defend the Middle East against it?

The answer is, first and foremost, the Turkish army of half a million men and, second though not to be disregarded, the British forces of about 70,000 now in Egypt, together with such support as the British can muster from Iraq and Jordan as well as from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. If the attack came tomorrow these are the forces that would try to repell it. They might not succeed but they are all there is.

Turkey is now in NATO. This is a very trite thing to say but there is a question whether the military implications of the fact have been fully appreciated and whether State and Defense have adjusted their thinking to the new situation.

It is worth recalling another very trite fact: that geographically, strategically, and militarily Turkey is in the Middle East. Her adherence to NATO has created new political and military relationships but it has not lifted Turkey out of the Middle East.

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If we were committed to the defense of Turkey by the Truman Doctrine, we are now all the more committed through the North Atlantic Treaty. Turkey has become the eastern flank of NATO. If it is a fair assumption that a Soviet attack on the Middle East means, even if the Soviets tried to avoid it, the involvement of Turkey, there must be some doubt whether any useful purpose is served by reiterating the declaration that the U.S. cannot undertake any commitment to defend the region. The defense of Turkey means the defense of the Middle East. The defense of the Middle East means the defense of Turkey.

This is not to say that we should extend the Truman Doctrine or NATO or any other kind of commitment to Iraq or Iran or any other of the states to the east and south of Turkey. It means rather that we should take these strategic and military facts more fully into account.

If we cannot contribute forces to the defense of the Middle East, it would appear to be all the more in our interest not only to assist in strengthening of Turkish and Commonwealth forces in the area but also, and even more important, to encourage close coordination in the command relationships between these forces and in their defense planning and deployment.

It is said that the Turks are resentful towards the British, chiefly because of the latter's efforts to obstruct Turkey's admission to NATO, and will not cooperate with the British commander at Suez. It is further said that the British commander is outside the boundaries of NATO and hence is debarred from engaging in joint planning with the Turks.

If this is so and if nothing can be done about it, so much the better for the Soviet Union.

But perhaps something can be done about it. The Turks, the British, and the U.S. are NATO allies. It should be possible to persuade each

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of the three allies (and if necessary other NATO members as well) that it is in the common interest of all NATO members that the most effective preparations possible should be made for the defense of their eastern flank.

In short, the U.S. should, in its own direct interest, use its best efforts at the political and military levels to bring the British and Turks together.

This enterprise does not call for the commitment of U.S. forces to the Middle East but it does involve something more than routine exhortations to our allies. It means that the U.S. may have to expend some of the prestige it has accumulated in Turkey. To the extent that we influence the Turks to cooperate with the British, we may have to forego attracting Turkish esteem and confidence at the expense of the British. Adherence to the policy that the defense of the Middle East is primarily a British responsibility calls for something more than lip service. On the other side, in recognition of Turkish susceptibilities and of the important fact that the Turkish army is seven or eight times the size of the British Middle East forces, we may have to persuade the British that they must give up their desire to impose a British commander on Turkish forces.

The enterprise would require reappraisal of present plans for the Middle East Command Organization. For one thing, these plans envisage a British commander working in relative isolation from the Turks. For another, they include political objectives which are so difficult of realization that concentration on them must inevitably impede progress in preparations, now in 1952, for the defense of the region. It may be that over the long term some kind of a general defense organization, including Arabs, Syrians, Egyptians, Iranians, Israelis, and others, is necessary for the region and will even solve some of its political problems

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problems. The immediate need, however, is surely to strengthen such existing forces as are worth strengthening and to get them to work together.

Finally, it would seem that there ought to be a working and planning relationship not only between the British Middle East commander and the Turks but also between him and CINCSOUTH. The problem is not to try to contrive some way to bring the British commander into NATO but to establish a connection between him and the NATO command that will strengthen NATO's own right flank.

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